

Peru Roundtable

May 2017

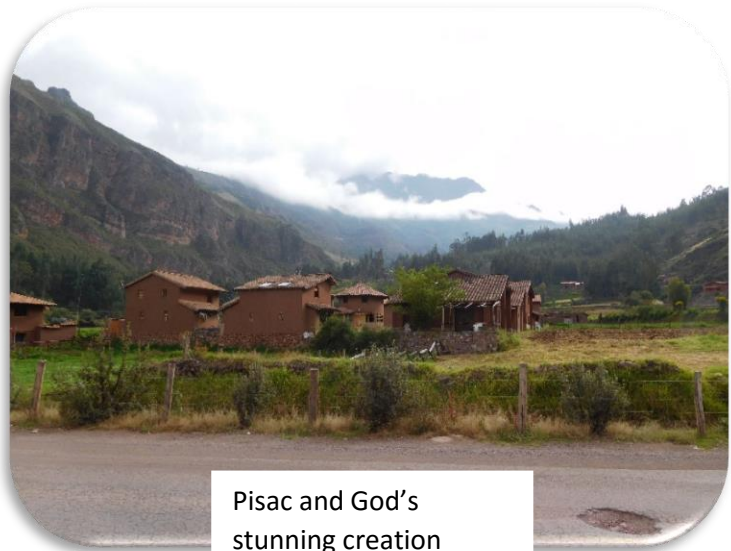
Sandra Lopez, Partnership Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean

The roundtables were a concept encouraged by the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries to enable the host partner church and international partner organisations to meet together and develop coherent and effective strategies for supporting the mission of the host church. I found that this meeting was an effective way of doing joined up thinking and ensuring that partners worked in a way that strengthened the host church rather than burden it and also as a way of ensuring that financial resources were used appropriately.



This year's Peru roundtable took place in Pisac, a town about 40 minutes away from the tourist city of Cusco. The theme of the roundtable was *Qonakum* which is Aymara for 'I bring the best of me and you bring the best of you'. There were representatives from the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church's Board of Higher Education and the Director of the widely read and distributed Upper Room devotional, as well as representatives from a number of Methodist theological colleges from the US and District Superintendents of the Methodist Church in Peru. The roundtable gave us plenty of opportunity to learn about the context

in which the church is operating. This is a context where corruption has hampered economic and social growth and where the left wing guerrilla movement, The Shining Path, caused chaos and carnage in the country, particularly in the 80s. The Shining Path are still active in parts of the country, albeit on a much less significant scale. The country also has one of the largest indigenous populations in the region, and the Aymara and Quechua communities are among the largest indigenous groupings. It was fascinating to learn about how the church is growing at a rate of 8% a year and how most of this growth is taking place in its rural indigenous communities. The church aims to grow from 9,000 members to 13,000 by 2021, and the roundtable in part was to help the church explore how they might do that and how we as international partners might be a part of this vision.



Pisac and God's
stunning creation

The church expressed in a number of ways that one of its greatest needs and one way in which to achieve this growth would be to strengthen the training of its large numbers of lay pastors and preachers. A number of these lay pastors were being trained at the Wesley Theological Seminary in Lima and were working towards ordination. The vast majority of lay pastors however have not received much theological training, which is compounded by the fact that a significant number of them have not gone far in their school education as well as the fact that for many lay pastors and members, Spanish is not their first language! Aymara or Quechua are the first languages for a large percentage of them, and one of the requests made by the church was to enable it to make resources available for pastors and congregations in their own language. As members of the

roundtable worked together in groups to explore how international partners might support this need, it became clear through our conversation that what was needed was someone who could coordinate the tasks of liaising with external partners to source existing resources, outsource their translation in the appropriate language and ensure the distribution of these resources throughout the national church in order to support the work of lay pastors. I suggested to the group that the Methodist Church in Britain could potentially fund the salary of a Christian Education Coordinator who could not only do this but also work on contextualising resources for a Peruvian Methodist readership. This could be done through the World Mission Fund's National in Mission Appointments programme, subject to a satisfactory NMA application form and approval from the relevant committee. The other international partners committed themselves to sharing their resources and funding some of the translation required into Quechua or Aymara. The representative from the Upper Room devotional made a commitment to translate the devotional into an Aymara/Quechua audio version so that those Methodist indigenous committees who have very low levels of literacy could access this resource. The United Methodist Church's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry made a commitment to sharing its Spanish language resources with the Methodist Church in Peru.



Quechua SALT group training students

The round table members were given the opportunity of worshipping with an indigenous Quechua community in a remote town called Patacancha. We were given the loveliest of welcomes and enjoyed worshipping God together with our Quechua brothers and sisters. I tried joining in with singing in Quechua, but it was too difficult! This is a Methodist community that loves God and has made great efforts to work towards sustainability as a congregation. The congregation there has built its own church rather than obtain funds from the national church, and is an example of the policy the national church has taken in the last four years of encouraging local churches to fund their own programme and church buildings. I

also met with some of the lay pastors who had

benefited from a Scholarship and Leadership Training grant that the Methodist Church in Britain had provided to enable the church to offer theological education to 157 lay pastors last year. They said that the training had strengthened their ministry and that this was in turn strengthening their churches.



After the roundtable I travelled to Juliaca (Puno region) with Bishop Samuel Aguilar Curi. Juliaca is at 4,000 above sea level and it was very cold there! From Juliaca we travelled to a number of communities near Lake Titicaca and on the border to Bolivia to visit local churches. Life in these rural communities is far from easy. The daily labour in the field growing mainly Quinoa and potatoes is tough and the majority of children are malnourished. We met a number of government officials looking at area statistics in regard to health, but not one of them could tell me what the government was actually doing to support the health of these communities. It did not seem like much was being done at all.

During this short visit to the Puno region we visited the congregation that is being developed by an NMA whose salary we support. This is Pastor Florentin Chambi, and he has been in post since January 2017. When he started his work with the congregation, there were three people attending church. Now there are 27! I saw a wonderful mix of men, women, young people and children, enthusiastic and passionate for God. Although we can only hope and pray for this kind of growth in our UK churches, it is happening all over the world in communities like these who have little or no resources, except for the Word of God. Pastor Florentin Chambi shared with me how he had built up the congregation by visiting the community door to door. The people he would speak to would ask him, "And what is the church going to give me?" expecting him to offer some kind of material good that might cause them to attend church (as I said, the material needs in these areas are substantial). He would reply saying, "What I have to offer you is the bread of life, the Word of God". The evidence today shows us that his preaching of the Word of God and his demonstration of love towards his community has touched the lives of many in this community.



An elderly Aymara woman digging for potatoes



Pastor Florentin Chambi, in a blue suit in the middle of the prayer circle



Praying with the ladies of the church

While in Peru I also met another National in Mission that we are supporting, Lluvia Collantes, who is the Coordinator of PROVEA, the Church's emergency and relief organisation. She manages a network of volunteers around the country who are being trained to respond quickly to disaster situations in their area. She has been instrumental in managing the response in Piura, a north western region of Peru, which sustained severe

flooding and rain in April due to the El Niño phenomenon and has affected many thousands of people there, claiming a significant number of lives in this impoverished region. PROVEA has been instrumental in providing an initial response to victims and has been recognised by the International Red Cross for its excellent coordination and support to affected communities. PROVEA are grateful to the British Methodist Church for sending £10,000 in solidarity funds that the church is using to support 400 families in two towns that the local state relief body has asked them to support.



Lluvia Collantes, on the right



Finally, it was also my great pleasure and privilege to visit Revd Margaret Valle, a former British Mission partner who has been living in Peru for many decades and is married to a retired Peruvian Methodist Minister. Revd Margaret worked with indigenous communities in her time as a mission partner for the church and continues to offer support in a variety of ways.

To conclude, it was a fruitful first partnership visit and I was able to experience the value of roundtables and how partners can use these to work effectively together and each offer its gifts and graces in order to help build a sister church. It was also a wonderful opportunity to see how the Lord has used the Methodist Church in Peru to reach the people in very rural areas and a blessing to see first-hand how churches in these areas are growing and flourishing, despite the challenges of living in very remote areas of the country. I was taken aback by the hospitality and kindness of every Peruvian community I visited, as well as by the breath-taking beauty of God's creation in Peru.



Lake Titicaca, Puno